



AUDIO NEWS

AUDIO BULLYS

A mother from Cheltenham has made an out-of-court offer to the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) to settle the file-sharing prosecution it brought against her 14-year-old daughter. The BBC reports that Sylvia Price faced a £2,500 bill for her daughter's activities and couldn't afford to contest the case.

Meanwhile, the BPI has lodged proceedings against five individuals, who it collectively accuses of making 8,906 music tracks available for download on file-sharing networks. "We have tried to agree fair settlements, but if people refuse to deal with the evidence against them, the law must take its course," said Geoff Taylor, BPI general counsel. "That's why we have had no choice but to take these five individuals to the High Court."

GETTING THE HORN

The performance of *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* at the recent Live8 concert suffered a potentially disastrous setback. Hours before the show, Sir Paul McCartney realised he didn't have parts for the French horn players, as the song had never been performed live.

Beatles producer George Martin wrote the parts and, although he was in New York at the time, recreated them from memory in the notation package Sibelius. He emailed the resulting file to Sir Paul, which meant the London show could go on.



REVIEW MUSIC-STREAMING HOMEPLUG

DEVOLO MicroLink dLAN Audio

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £103 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.devolo.co.uk



In *What's New*, *Shopper* April 2005 we tested Devolo's dLAN starter kit, which sends data between power sockets over the mains. This adaptor uses the same system to stream audio, but it requires another dLAN Ethernet or Audio plug.

With an Ethernet plug, you can stream music from your PC, or you can pair two Audio plugs to carry music from a hi-fi to some amplified speakers. Music is carried digitally, so there's no audible interference, but the bit rate is limited to 192Kbit/s.

Setup was easy, although it is harder on a network without DHCP. The signal quality didn't seem to be affected by the distance between the plugs, but we noticed a delay that increased with separation.

The plug uses up a socket, and its size may make it unsuitable for confined outlets. It's more expensive than Apple's wireless AirPort Express, but it has a wider range of functions including digital inputs and outputs. It's a good product, but it won't suit everyone.

Simon Handby

✓ Works where wireless doesn't; good range of connectors

✗ Expensive; physical size makes it hard to use in some sockets

SPECIFICATIONS Audio HomePlug adaptor, stereo RCA input/outputs, wired S/PDIF input/output, mini jack line output/microphone input. Part code 1156

REVIEW STUDIO MONITOR SPEAKERS

TAPCO S5



RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £240 inc VAT for the pair

SUPPLIER www.imuso.co.uk

DETAILS www.tapcogear.com



If you compose, record or mix music, you need suitable speakers. Regular speakers can give an inaccurate impression of the frequency levels in a piece, but professional monitors can be expensive.

These active studio monitors were designed by audio pros Mackie, but produced in China by Tapco, so they're relatively affordable and of high quality. Each speaker has two internal amplifiers and can handle a variety of balanced and unbalanced inputs.

A rotary control allows for the fine-tuning of levels.

The frequency response is essentially flat, but you can tailor it with two switches that increase bass, and boost or cut treble. They sound pure and crisp, particularly across the mid-range where we could hear details we'd never noticed in songs we knew well.

These are not suitable for regular PC use, but if you work with music, they're worth the price.

Simon Handby

✓ Accurate, beautifully defined sound for musicians and engineers

✗ Not ideal for general use

SPECIFICATIONS Dual internal amplifiers (60+60W per speaker), each speaker has balanced TRS and XLR inputs and unbalanced RCA input

HOTLIST 2.1 SPEAKERS

TRUST 2.1 Speaker Set SP-3600A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £32 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.trust.com



These classy speakers have a remote that includes a volume control, line input and headphone socket. Sound quality was extremely good in our tests, with solid bass and detailed mid and high frequencies. They aren't massively loud, and the satellite cables are only 1.5 metres long, but they're great value.



SPECIFICATIONS 2.1 speakers, line and aux inputs, 28W RMS power. Part code 14235

HOTLIST SOUND CARD

CREATIVE Audigy 2 ZS

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £63 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

The inputs and outputs on Creative's Audigy 2 ZS are capable of 24-bit, 96kHz recording and playback for increased clarity. Specialist sound cards have better signal-to-noise performance, but the Audigy's unsurpassed games effects, excellent games bundle and exhaustive DVD-Video and DVD-Audio support make it a great buy for avid gamers or music enthusiasts.



SPECIFICATIONS Line, mic and optical S/PDIF inputs, four line (7.1) outputs, FireWire, PCI interface. Part code 70SB035000005

HOTLIST SURROUND SPEAKER SET

LOGITECH Z-5500

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £208 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.logitech.co.uk

Logitech's 5.1 Z-5500 speakers have what it takes to satisfy most people's surround-sound needs. They're powerful enough to shake the house with 505W RMS, and they deliver rich bass thanks to the large sub-woofer.

The speakers are THX-certified and come with a DTS and Dolby Digital decoder, so you can plug in a DVD player as well as a PC.



SPECIFICATIONS 5.1 surround sound, 505W RMS, optical and coaxial digital inputs, three stereo inputs, Dolby Digital and DTS decoder. Part code 970115-0120

REVIEW WIRELESS MUSIC SERVER**HERMSTEDT
Hifidelio**

RATING ★★

PRICE £474 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.hermstedt.com/english/eshopDETAILS www.hifi-wifi.co.uk

Devices that stream audio files from networked storage or a PC are a great way of accessing digital music from the living room, but the Hifidelio is the first product we've seen that's designed to keep it there. It can rip music files to its own hard disk, play them back, share them over a network and burn audio CDs. What's more, it's completely silent, which makes it more suitable than most PCs.

The Hifidelio looks like something you'd find in a high-end stereo setup. The rear panel has a good range of analogue and digital audio connectors, but an Ethernet switch and wireless antenna show that this isn't a conventional audio product. It works as a CD player and standalone storage device for your CD collection, or you can integrate it with an existing wired or wireless network.

Several modes are available, including Hifidelio Network, which provides IP addresses for computers attached to its four-port switch. You can also connect it to an existing network over a wired or wireless connection. It supports 802.11g WiFi and WEP encryption but won't connect to a network protected by WPA, although a firmware update will fix this at a later date.

Once networked, the Hifidelio can play songs from, or serve music to, a computer running iTunes. It can also talk to any application or device using the UPnP/AV protocol, but it doesn't support any form of rights-protected audio file. PC users can get limited access to the Hifidelio's contents through an Explorer window, but it's not possible to browse its music library.

Two USB ports enable you to connect an MP3 player directly, but the Hifidelio didn't recognise the iPod or three other devices we tried. Both ports are at the rear, so they are tricky to access once you've incorporated the device into your hi-fi system.

We found the Hifidelio harder to use than a normal audio device. Navigation is easy with the jog wheel, but a jog-shuttle changes levels on the menu. If you let go of this too quickly, it springs back, often cancelling the action you wanted. When using the remote control, operation wasn't always consistent and intuitive.

The Hifidelio sounds great when playing CDs, but MP3 is the only audio format it encodes, at a maximum of 192Kbit/s. You can import better-sounding compressed formats such as Ogg Vorbis, but relying on a PC for encoding rather diminishes the Hifidelio's *raison d'être*. It also lacks support for WMA, although a firmware update will fix this. The Hifidelio has great potential, but it has too many rough edges and omissions for the price.

Simon Handby

✓ Sounds great; loads of features

✗ Hard to set up and use; doesn't encode all formats; didn't recognise test MP3 players

SPECIFICATIONS 80GB wireless music server, stereo RCA input/output, wired and optical S/PDIF outputs, 802.11g wireless and four-port 10/100 network switch, two USB 2.0 ports.
Part code HER7000003

HOTLIST HARD DISK MP3 PLAYER**APPLE
iPod mini 6GB**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £162 inc VAT

SUPPLIER <http://uk.insight.com>DETAILS www.apple.com/uk

Apple has endowed new iPod minis with a longer battery life: this 6GB model lasted more than 24 hours in our tests. There's no custom EQ, it won't play WMAs and you'll need to stick to iTunes for downloading music, but if that doesn't bother you, this is the best compact player.



SPECIFICATIONS 6GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed interface, MP3, AAC, WAV, AIFF and Audible playback. **Part code** M9803B/A

HOTLIST HARD DISK MP3 PLAYER**SONY
NW-HD5 20GB**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £170 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.sony.co.uk

The NW-HD5 looks and sounds superb, and is more compact than most MP3 players with a 1.8" disk. It doesn't play WMA files, though, so it can't be used with stores like Napster. The player's removable battery lasted 30 hours in our test. It's great value if you don't buy music online.



SPECIFICATIONS 20GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed interface, MP3, ATRAC3, ATRAC3plus. **Part code** NWHD5R

**CHOOSING A...
SPEAKER
SYSTEM**

Follow our sound advice to selecting the best speaker setup

1 PC speaker systems, which consist of speakers and an amplifier to power them, can cost anything from £5 to £300. The cheapest sets, with the specifications shown in grey below, will be fine for those who simply want to play Windows alert noises on a PC they use solely for work.

2 Those who use their PC for any kind of entertainment should go for a better system. The first thing to look for is a sub-woofer, which handles bass frequencies, while the satellites output mid- and high-frequency sounds. Other than this, the best way to establish the quality of a system is to consult our reviews. Specs don't tell you much and price often bears little relation to performance.

3 Games and DVDs will benefit greatly from a surround system. The standard surround configuration is 5.1 (five satellites and one sub-woofer), but those who must have the latest technologies should consider 6.1 or 7.1 speakers, plus a compatible sound card that supports the extended Dolby Digital EX format.

4 The power rating can give you a rough idea of how loud the speakers will go. Ignore PMPO or Peak Power ratings, which can be as much as 10 times the RMS figure. A 50W RMS system should provide ample volume for a desktop PC, but for a home cinema look for 100W or more.

5 Stereo speakers just need a single analogue stereo input, while a 5.1 system needs three. Surround systems with Dolby Digital decoders must be fed through an S/PDIF digital input, which comes in (non-compatible) coaxial and optical versions. However, as Dolby Digital decoding can be handled in software, surround speakers with analogue inputs are much more cost-effective.

FILL IN YOUR SPECS HERE
(Recommended minimum in grey)

SURROUND FORMAT: Stereo

RMS POWER: 5W

INPUTS: 1x analogue

BUILT-IN DECODING: None